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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NAIROBI 003463

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DEPT FOR AF/E AND A/S FRAZER

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SUBJECT: Somalia - NRC Closing and Next Steps

Classified by PolOff Mitch Benedict for reasons 1.4 (b,d)

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Summary  
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1 (C) In a meeting August 27 with the Ambassador NGRC Chairman Ali Mahdi said the National Reconciliation Congress (NRC) would end in 45 days as he promised, on August 30. The NRC has done all it can, and the TFG now must take over to implement the transitional tasks ahead.

He acknowledged that some groups -- those in Asmara, some key Hawiye in Mogadishu, and members of the diaspora -- remain outside the reconciliation process, but efforts continue to bring them into an ongoing reconciliation and dialogue process.  
End Summary.

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NRC Closes August 30  
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12. (C) National Governance and Reconciliation Committee (NGRC) Chairman Ali Mahdi has announced that the NRC will close, as scheduled, on August 30. He told us he promised at the beginning it would last 45 days -- it opened July 15, and therefore he is proud to be able to deliver a completed Congress on August 30. Delegates are expected to begin departing Mogadishu the first week of September. The closing of the NRC does not signal that national reconciliation has been completed, Mahdi said. Mahdi expects the TFG to extend the NGRC's mandate so that he can continue to encourage all segments of Somali society to engage in dialogue and reconciliation.

13. (C) The NGRC succeeded in bringing in a major portion of the 156-member Hawiye umbrella group (first called the Hawiye Leadership Council, then the Hawiye Traditional and Unity Council -- HTUC). At last count 101 HTUC members were participating in the NRC, said Mahdi. The remaining 55 are still being encouraged to attend, even if only to indicate support to their respective Ugas or Sultan representing their clan. Asked who we should still reach out to in the hope of furthering reconciliation, Mahdi suggested Mohamed Uluso (Hawiye/Haber Gedir/Ayr). Per previous reporting, we will continue to do so.

14. (C) Mahdi assured us he has done all he can to secure the participation of others, such as those aligned with the Council of Islamic Courts (CIC), but without success. He said he is trying to get them to lay down their arms, but the CIC "is still in armed conflict." Mahdi commented that Aden Ayrow is known to be in Mogadishu. The Ambassador indicated the U.S. would be interested in further details about Ayrow's whereabouts, but Mahdi said he has no detailed information.

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15. (C) Mahdi admitted the work of the NRC is not complete. However, the delegates were successful in "laying the groundwork for further progress." He said managing 3,000 people, in the midst of fighting and violence, and without the ability to travel abroad to learn from the experience of others and to meet diaspora members, was challenging and cannot be continued. However, the original eleven point agenda has been adopted and discussed fully.

16. (C) According to Mahdi, there is already a draft set of recommendations prepared for approval by a plenary session on August 30. Once approved, the recommendations will be signed by the delegates, and the NRC will come to a close. Mahdi promised to provide us with a draft of the recommendations before August 30. The recommendations are expected to include:

- immediately forming an inclusive constitution drafting committee;
- moving ahead quickly with a census;
- supporting an amendment to the Transitional Federal Charter that would allow the government to appoint ministers from outside the Parliament (Comment: currently the Charter stipulates that only Members of Parliament may be appointed ministers. End Comment); Mahdi noted that this will be crucial in order to enable real power-sharing and to ensure that capable ministers are appointed;
- supporting good governance initiatives, such as a law on political parties that institutes a multi-party system, and a law protecting women's rights; and
- forming a committee and special court to resolve property ownership disputes.

17. (C) Mahdi said the recommendations will also make clear that

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elections can happen no later than 2009, as stipulated in the Charter, and that there will be no extension of the TFG's mandate. According to Mahdi, the most important task is to open the government up to non-MPs. He said the government is in critical need of "technocratic" ministers from the outside who can implement what has been agreed to. His vision is that there will be a new cabinet with a maximum of 20-25 ministers, predominately intellectuals and technocrats who are drawn from all clans. Mahdi plans to be in the U.S. during September both to visit his children there and to make contacts with key members of the diaspora with respect to possible ministerial positions.

18. (C) Mahdi plans to seek a new mandate for a somewhat revised NGRC to continue the work of reconciliation. He said the exact details are still being discussed, but he anticipates with "ninety-nine percent certainty" that President Yusuf will agree to continue the process. The new NGRC will include intellectuals and elders, appointed by Mahdi. He said he planned to meet on August 28 with Ahmed Diriye of the opposition HTUC bloc, who he is still trying to get to the NRC. He said he is still hopeful that 19 moderate members from the so-called Asmara group will participate before the closing of the NRC. Asked about former Speaker of Parliament Sharif Hassan, Mahdi said he heard Hassan may depart the scene by going to Australia where one of his four wives lives.

19. (C) The King of Saudi Arabia has invited 300 NRC delegates and senior elders to Mecca before the start of Ramadan, anticipated on or about September 13, to take part in a ceremony designed to commit to the delegates to implement the NRC recommendations. A good Muslim cannot lie in Mecca, said Mahdi, hence the desire to have the most influential and senior participants who signed the NRC declarations swear before each other that they will abide by the outcomes of the Congress.

110. (C) Asked about continuing reports of violence and conflict in Mogadishu, Mahdi insisted the contrary. Over the period of the NRC the level of generalized violence in Mogadishu actually decreased, said Mahdi. The problem has become, Mahdi said, targeted assassinations of key moderates carried out by Islamic Courts radicals. The NRC itself was incident-free. The Ambassador suggested, and Mahdi agreed, that the language in the closing NRC

declaration should offer an opening to those who renounce violence and want to participate constructively in reconciliation and a political dialogue that will further the transition.

¶11. (C) Mahdi, who said he has not seen some of his U.S. resident children in seven years (Comment: He said he has a son in Rochester, Minnesota, a daughter half way through medical school, and another son in college. End Comment) plans to visit the U.S. in September. He intends to see off the delegates the first week of September, set up the new NGRC, accompany the group to Mecca, and then go to the U.S.

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Comment  
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¶12. (C) Following Mahdi's briefing of the International Advisory Committee on August 26 there was general agreement among donors that, while the NRC may not have been as inclusive and fully successful as they hoped, there is little chance at this date to make it more inclusive or achieve a more optimum outcome. On balance they concluded - and we strongly agree -- that in order to maintain some momentum there toward 2009, the best course is to take the high ground with respect to the results of the Congress, welcoming them while making clear that the process of national reconciliation is far from complete. At the same time, the donors must push the TFG to implement the recommendations of the Congress and to maintain outreach to further the reconciliation process.

¶13. (C) If the recommendations of the NRC include, as we expect, specific action items related to good governance and execution of transitional tasks, then momentum can be maintained by pressing the TFG and those in opposition to engage in dialogue to achieve implementation of the NRC recommendations, and by providing U.S. assistance for implementation as well. The U.S. role will remain crucial in facilitating dialogue and meetings between key opposition figures and the NGRC and the TFG on the way forward.

¶14. (C) The concept of a small reformulated NGRC that will oversee implementation of NRC recommendations, and work seriously to bring in outside elements to a larger dialogue and political reconciliation, may be a good one. However, it will be essential to ensure that this follow-on mechanism is realistic and effective.  
RANNEBERGER